

**Chairman Peters Opening Statement As Prepared for Delivery**  
**Full Committee Hearing: Examining Federal Efforts to Address PFAS Contamination**  
**December 9, 2021**

Communities in my home state of Michigan, and across the country, have been grappling with exposure to harmful highly-fluorinated chemicals, known as PFAS.

Known as “forever chemicals,” PFAS don’t break down naturally in the environment. While these chemicals are used in many consumer products, they are also a key ingredient in many firefighting foams that have been widely used on military installations across the country.

Exposure to these chemicals, whether through contact with firefighting foam, or contamination found in groundwater sources, presents serious health and environmental risks to first responders, servicemembers, their families, and the communities surrounding these military sites.

In Michigan, we’ve seen firsthand how PFAS contamination can cause serious harm to our communities.

For example, the residents of Oscoda, Michigan, which is home to the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base, have been exposed to harmful PFAS substances in their groundwater and waterways, including at Van Etten Lake, for many years.

I have long pushed for the Air Force to do more to engage with the community and address this serious contamination at Wurtsmith, and to prevent further harm to the people and the environment of Oscoda.

Unfortunately, Oscoda is not alone. There are contaminated sites throughout Michigan, including Camp Grayling, Selfridge Air National Guard Base, the K.I. Sawyer Air Force Base, the Alpena Regional Airport, and in states across the country.

Residents in each of these affected communities are asking us to help protect their health, their loved ones, and their water.

Today, we will discuss a recent Inspector General report that found that the Department of Defense did not take sufficient action to limit this unnecessary, and unacceptable, exposure to PFAS.

According to this report, despite having information that PFAS exposure presented concerning health and environmental risks, the Department of Defense failed to warn servicemembers, their families, and local communities about these potential risks for five years, unnecessarily putting them in harm’s way.

The Department of Defense has also been reluctant to accept responsibility for their role in contributing to the PFAS contamination crisis, and have been slow to take vital actions that would help limit further exposure to these dangerous substances.

The Department also lacks a comprehensive approach across all its branches to better coordinate efforts to identify areas of contamination, mitigate exposure, and clean up PFAS contamination, including from sources that go beyond firefighting foams.

Despite these serious shortcomings, I appreciate that the Department has taken some important, proactive steps to better address PFAS contamination. The Department has begun identifying some of the populations who have been exposed, and conducting blood tests among firefighters. Moving forward, there is more the Department could do to expand their blood testing plan to better track the long-term health consequences of PFAS exposure.

Finally, the Department of Defense must do more to work collaboratively with communities and state and local stakeholders who have suffered from PFAS contamination over the years.

State officials in Michigan and elsewhere have done important work to test for PFAS, map contamination sites, and begin remediation efforts. We'll hear more about these efforts in our second panel today, but the Department of Defense must build better partnerships with state experts, and advocates, who are leading the charge to address these serious challenges.

I look forward to hearing from the Inspector General and Defense Department officials today about this important report, and what else must be done to protect our servicemembers and communities from the devastating effects of PFAS exposure.

The Department of Defense's failure to quickly act and alert servicemembers, their families, and others, that they may have been exposed to toxic chemicals is simply unacceptable and they must be held accountable.

These failures have resulted in devastating consequences for countless communities across the country. Our second panel of witnesses represent organizations that are working to combat the PFAS crisis in New Hampshire, Ohio, and Michigan.

I'd like to thank each of you for being here, and look forward to discussing how the contamination of these harmful chemicals has impacted the health and wellbeing of your families and friends, who have had to endure the harmful effects of PFAS exposure for years.

This panel will also provide valuable insights into how the federal government – including the Department of Defense, can work with local governments and organizations on the ground to warn communities about possible exposure to PFAS, and expedite clean-up and assistance for affected communities.